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ABSTRACT

The traditional female stereotype described norms for women in that the characteristics were deemed to be "appropriate" for all women. Recent research described three role-based subcategories of women (housewife, professional woman, sex object) which are based on the female homemaking, work, or romantic roles respectively. The subcategories suggest the traditional stereotype may not be normative, and instead, norms may be related to women's chosen roles. Two studies were conducted to investigate college student evaluative judgments about subcategory members and to examine normative requirements for women. In Experiment 1, college students (N=76) made judgments about 16 brief situations in which subcategory members acted either well or poorly in four role characteristics: maternal sensitivities, interpersonal tendencies, financial provider responsibilities, and instrumental tendencies. Results indicated that the most salient comparison was between good and bad behavior. Experiment 2 used the same materials and design as Experiment 1 except subjects (N=76) made judgments about subcategory members behaving poorly only. Results supported the traditional stereotype. Normative social pressure appears to be related to the maternal role. Sanctions were primarily issued against all women when they violated the maternal role and against the sex object as she participated in all roles. (NB)

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Paper presented at the 62nd annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, New York, New York.

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College Student Evaluations of Stereotypic Female Subcategory Members

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Abstract

The traditional female stereotype described norms for women in that the characteristics were deemed to be "appropriate" for all women. Recent research described three role-based subcategories of women, housewife, professional woman, sex object, which are based on the female homemaking, work, or romantic roles respectively. The subcategories suggest the traditional stereotype may not be normative, and instead, norms may be related to women's chosen roles. Two studies investigated college student evaluative judgments about subcategory members.

In Experiment 1, college students made judgments about subcategory members who acted either well or poorly in four role characteristics: maternal sensitivities, interpersonal tendencies, financial provider responsibilities, and instrumental tendencies. Results indicated that the most salient comparison was between good and bad behavior.

Experiment 2 used the same materials and design as Experiment 1 except subjects made judgments about subcategory members behaving poorly only. Results supported the traditional stereotype. Sanctions were primarily issued against all women when they violated the maternal role and against the sex object as she participated in all roles.

Introduction

The traditional female stereotype described women by traits such as dependent, submissive, and emotional (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972). These traits have become known as the expressiveness cluster and are consistent with our cultural expectations that women will nurture the family and will take care of the home.

An important element of that stereotype was that women were expected to possess the characteristics of the stereotype. Acquisition of the stereotypic characteristics was considered to be a necessary factor in female development (Huston, 1983; Weitzman, 1979), and was considered to be the basis for good mental health during adulthood (Ruble & Ruble, 1982). In other words, the traditional female stereotype was normative in that it outlined the appropriate female behavior which was prescribed by the culture (Ruble & Ruble, 1982).

Since one criterion for normative characteristics is that they are believed to be "appropriate" for members of that stereotypic group (Eagly, 1987), the suggestion is that approval will be extended when the appropriate characteristics are exhibited and that disapproval, or sanctions, will result when they are not exhibited (Ruble & Ruble, 1982).

More recent research on gender stereotypes has been from the social cognitive perspective. Instead of emphasizing similarities among women, this research has focused on describing differences among women. One body of research investigated

subcategories of women which are determined by the roles upon which the subcategory members focus. Three role-based subcategories have been documented: the housewife, the professional woman, and the sex object or Playboy bunny (Clifton, McGrath, & Wick, 1976; Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; England & Hyland, 1987; Noseworthy & Lott, 1984). The housewife is perceived as focused on her family. Participants rate her as understanding and cooperative, and indicate that she works with the Boy Scouts and goes to bake sales. The professional woman is perceived as focused on her career and is rated as independent and well-spoken. She submits reports and argues for the Equal Rights Amendment. The major focus of the sex object is on appealing to the opposite sex, and she is flirtatious and seductive. She winks, wiggles, and does not button the top two buttons of her blouse (England & Hyland, 1987).

In view of the categorical differences described in the recent research using the subcategory approach, it is important that we reexamine the normative expectations about women. It may be that when confronted with women from the different subcategories, people may exert social pressure for the different kinds of women to conform to the role expectations related to their subcategory membership. On the other hand, it may be that, despite perceptions of differences among women, social pressure is still directed at women to conform to the traditional stereotypic role expectations. Two studies were conducted to examine normative requirements for women.

In the first study, participants are asked to make evaluative judgments about a subcategory member behaving either well or poorly in four different role characteristics. Two of the role characteristics investigated are traditionally associated with women, maternal sensitivities and interpersonal tendencies. The other two role characteristics investigated, financial provider responsibilities and instrumental tendencies, are traditionally associated with men but were included in this study because recently they have been associated with the professional women (England, 1988; Geis, Brown, Jennings, & Corrado-Taylor, 1984).

Experiment 1

Method

Participants. Seventy-six college students participated.

Materials and procedure. Booklets were constructed using materials pretested in prior studies (England, 1988; England & Hyland, 1987). Each booklet contained a character description of a woman from one of the subcategories, a housewife, a professional woman, a sex object, or a woman in general, the control character.

The character description was followed by sixteen brief situations. There were four situations representing each of the four role characteristics. Two situations for each role characteristic showed the woman making a good response for the situation and two showed the woman making a poor response. An example of a situation having to do with financial provider

responsibilities is:

Susan has asked for a promotion into a position that has just become available in a different department. She is qualified for the position but does not get the job. The company brings someone from the outside in over her.

Good Response: Susan continues upgrading her abilities and applies for the next promotion.

Poor Response: Susan gives two weeks notice.

Each booklet contained a situation only once with either the good response or the poor response. Each situation appeared on a separate page which also contained the following evaluative questions:

(1) How much do you like Susan?

(2) How much do you respect her?

(3) How well-adjusted is Susan?

Participants made ratings on a seven point scale with one representing not at all and seven representing very much.

The same random order for the situations was used in all booklets, but the order was counterbalanced.

Results and Discussion

A MANOVA was performed on the ratings in a 4 (category of woman) X 4 (question) X 4 (role characteristic) X 2 (quality of response) design. Category of woman was a between-subject variable, and questions, role characteristics, and quality of response were within-subject variables.

The interaction which included all four variables was the

interaction of primary interest, but it was not significant, $F(27, 648) = < 1$. Further analyses indicated that participants did not differentiate between subcategories of women.

There was a significant three-way interaction between question, role characteristic, and quality of response $F(9, 648) = 7.11$, $p < .0001$. This interaction was probed by performing an analysis on each question. Each of these analyses showed a significant two-way interaction between role characteristic and quality of response (Like, $F(3, 225) = 14.44$, $p < .0001$; Respect, $F(3, 225) = 2.69$, $p < .05$; Adjustment, $F(3, 225) = 3.68$, $p < .01$), and therefore, was followed by analyses of each level of quality of response (Like: Good response, $F(3, 225) = 10.81$, $p < .001$, Poor response, $F(3, 225) = 11.97$, $p < .0001$; Respect: Good response, $F(3, 225) = 7.27$, $p < .0001$, Poor response, $F(3, 225) = 4.21$, $p < .006$; Adjustment: Good response, $F(3, 225) = < 1$, Poor response, $F(3, 225) = 8.14$, $p < .0001$). Where appropriate, the Newman Keuls procedure was performed to identify significant differences among the means. All differences are reported at the .05 level of significance.

For poor quality responses (See Table 1), the results indicate that participants issued sanctions primarily for violations of the maternal role. These college students liked and respected all women least and rated then as less well-adjusted when acting poorly in their maternal role. Participants also rated all women as less well adjusted when acting poorly in their financial provider role.

For good quality responses (See Table 2), there were no differences in ratings of adjustment. This indicates that when women act well, they are perceived as well-adjusted in all roles. Participants respected woman more in the maternal role than in their financial provider role but less than in their maternal role than in their interpersonal role. They also liked them more in the maternal, interpersonal, and instrumental roles than in the financial provider role.

Overall, participants registered disapproval for poor quality behavior and approval for high quality behavior; however, they did not make the predicted distinctions between the subcategories of women. One interpretation for this finding is that the most salient comparison was between good and bad behavior and that that comparison overrode comparisons between the different kinds of women. A second study was performed to test the hypothesis that when good verses bad behavior is not the salient comparison, the normative social pressure is directed at women who do not fulfill the requirements of their chosen roles.

Experiment 2

This study tested whether the results in Experiment 1 were due to the salience of good versus bad behavior. If that comparison was the determining factor, it would be predicted that in the second study when making judgments on poor behavior only, participants would issue sanctions against subcategory members for violation of their primary roles.

Method

Participants. Seventy-six college students participated.

Materials and Procedure. The materials were the same as Experiment 1 except that only poor quality responses were used.

Results and Discussion

A MANOVA was performed on the ratings in a 4 (category of woman) X 4 (question) X 4 (role characteristic) design. Category of woman was the between-subject factor and questions and role characteristics were the within-subject factors.

A significant three-way interaction would indicate that participants extended different sanctions to the subcategories of women as they responded in the various roles. It was not significant $F(27, 648) = < 1$.

There were two significant two-way interactions. First, there was a significant two-way interaction between question and role characteristic, $F(9, 648) = 6.88$, $p < .0001$. Analyses were performed on each question. Results indicate that participants respected the women less ($F(3,225) = 28.92$, $p < .0001$), liked them less ($F(3, 225) = 45.05$, $p < .0001$), and perceived them as less well-adjusted ($F(3, 225) = 36.65$, $p < .0001$), when acting poorly in their maternal role than in the other roles (Table 3).

Second, the two-way interaction between question and category-of-woman was significant, $F(9, 216) = 4.14$, $p < .0001$. Each question was probed with a one-way analysis of variance. When presented with only poor behavior, participants had more respect ($F(3,72) = 4.56$, $p < .005$) and liking ($F(3,72) = 4.48$, $p < .006$.) for the housewife than for the sex object (Table 4).

Further, they rated both the housewife and the professional woman as more well-adjusted ($F(3,72) = 7.25$, $p < .0003$) than the sex object.

In sum, the results of both studies are similar indicating that the comparison between good versus bad behavior did not overshadow all else in the first experiment. College students perceived all women as less likeable, less worthy of respect, and less well adjusted when they acted poorly in their maternal role than when they acted poorly in their other roles.

There was one difference between the two studies. When presented with only poor behavior, participants discriminated between subcategories of women. In particular, they issued more severe sanctions against the sex object than they did the housewife.

General Discussion

Normative social pressure appears to be related to the maternal role. When all women violated their maternal role, college students like them less, respected them less, and considered them to be less well-adjusted, regardless of their subcategory membership. This finding is consistent with the traditional beliefs about women. However, it is also consistent with subcategory research (England, 1988). England (1988) found that women in all subcategories were expected to take their maternal role seriously. The present finding indicates that for college students those expectations include social pressure and, therefore, may be normative.

It is not clear whether this social pressure for maternity all encompassing. The maternal situations on which participants made their judgments contained references to children, and participants could assume that the women they were judging already had children. It may be that sanctions differ for women who do not have children. One interesting question for future research is whether there is social pressure for women to have children. Nancy Russo (Russo, 1979) has argued that there is a prescription in our culture that all women should want and should have babies. If the motherhood mandate still operates, normative expectations about women who do not have children would cross subcategory lines and would follow the traditional norms for women. On the other hand, if the recent changes that have occurred in women's roles have had an effect on their accepted maternal responsibilities, women may have more freedom in the initial choice of whether or not they will actually have children. If that is the case, their role focus may influence how much social pressure is exerted toward them. It may be that less pressure would be directed against professional women and women who are focused on their sexuality since their primary focus in not on their home.

When the college student participants did respond to subcategory membership, their evaluations were made along traditional lines. Even when all the women were acting poorly, participants made more positive evaluations of the housewife who is focused on the traditional home role and made more negative

evaluations against the sex object who is related to the traditional "woman as temptress."

The findings suggest that, when it comes to making the sort of evaluative judgements about women that were investigated in these studies, the traditional stereotypes may be alive and well. People do not make sanctions because women are not fulfilling the roles upon which they are focused. Instead, people are likely to make sanctions along the traditional lines of when a woman is not fulfilling her role as mother or whether she is perceived as a good or bad woman.

In sum, prior research has shown that people perceive important differences among women (Clifton, McGrath, & Wick, 1976; Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; England & Hyland, 1987; Noseworthy & Lott, 1984). Prior research has also shown that people have differing behavioral expectations for those different women as they pursue their chosen roles (England, 1988). However, there is much for future research to answer about how those perceived differences influence judgments of and interactions with the different kinds of women. The present studies indicate that these differences are accepted to some degree when women are performing well since all women were perceived as well-adjusted regardless of their subcategory membership or role. Future research must investigate other instances when the differences among women influence perceivers responses to them.

Table 1

Experiment 1: Mean Participant Evaluations of Women Making Poor Responses For Each Role Characteristic

	Role Characteristic			
Question	Maternal	Interpersonal	Instrumental	Financial Provider
Liking	3.15	3.61	3.98	3.65
Respect	3.22	3.67	3.73	3.44
Adjustment	3.45	3.95	3.95	3.39

Note: Ratings were made on a scale of from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much)

Table 2

Experiment 1: Mean Participant Evaluations of Women Making Good Responses For Each Role Characteristic

	Role Characteristic			
Question	Maternal	Interpersonal	Instrumental	Financial Provider
Liking	5.32	5.43	5.14	4.86
Respect	5.39	5.68	5.48	5.15
Adjustment	5.41	5.55	5.51	5.43

Note: Ratings were made on a scale of from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much)

Table 3

Experiment 2: Mean Participant Evaluations for Questions by Role Characteristic: Poor Resonses Only

	Role Characteristic			
Question	Maternal	Interpersonal	Instrumental	Financial Provider
Liking	2.56	3.42	3.64	3.29
Respect	2.63	3.51	3.53	3.23
Adjustment	2.70	3.75	3.53	3.13

Note: Ratings were made on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Table 4

Experiment 2: Mean Particpant Evaluations of Subcategories of Women For Each Question: Poor Responses Only

Question	Subcategory of Woman			
	Housewife	Professional Women	Sex Object	Women in General
Liking	3.78	3.24	2.63	3.26
Respect	3.74	3.32	2.67	3.17
Adjustment	3.80	3.52	2.68	3.11

Note: Ratings were made on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

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